

VZCZCXRO9038
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #3722/01 3301337
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 251337Z NOV 08
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0548
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003722

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/24/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)

SUBJECT: WASIT: SADRIST LEADER SUPPORTS SOFA, MALIKI

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor John Fox for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C / / REL TO USA, ACGU) Summary: Over 1,000 people participated in a November 20 pro-SOFA rally in Kut, organized by Sheikh Mohammed Reda al-Numani, an associate of Prime Minister Maliki and a long-time friend of the al-Sadr family. On the preceding day, PRT, 41st Fires Brigade, and Iraqi Army officials met with Numani to talk about security in Wasit and Numani's continuing relationship with the Sadr family. Numani claimed that he had spoken several times recently with Muqtada al-Sadr about the SOFA, and claimed that Muqtada's opposition to the agreement is not as strenuous as many think. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Sheikh Numani led a pro-SOFA rally on November 20 in the plaza in front of Wasit's Provincial Council building. Over 1,000 people participated in the rally, displaying banners from the tribes of Wasit stating that they supported the Prime Minister, the Iraqi Government, and the SOFA. Many were affiliated with the province's recently-created Support Council. Marchers sang and shouted pro-Maliki and pro-SOFA sentiments. There was no violence and the crowd dispersed after a little over an hour. This appears to have been a well prepared political rally organized not only by Numani, but also by the Da'wa party.

Sheikh Numani Meets with Coalition and PRT

¶3. (C / / REL TO USA, ACGU) On November 19, PRT Wasit, the Commander of 41st Fires Brigade, Wasit Police Chief MG Hanin, and Wasit's senior Iraqi Army Commander BG Abid met with Sheikh Numani in Kut. Numani, a long-time associate of Maliki with strong ties to the Sadr family, discussed the SOFA and his efforts to gain its approval among the people of Wasit Province. Numani lives in Numaniyah, a city along the Tigris River with a strong Sadrist presence. He has known Maliki since the 1970s, when he was a student and an office manager for Mohammed Baqir al-Sadr. Their relationship grew during their years in exile in Iran.

Iraq Needs Stability SOFA Provides

¶4. (C / / REL TO USA, ACGU) Sheikh Numani, dressed in black robes and a white turban, opened the meeting by calling the United States and the United Kingdom friends of Iraq. He was thankful that Coalition Forces had overthrown Saddam's regime and said that no other people in the world could have brought about this change. He had been living in exile in Iran when Coalition Forces first entered Iraq in 2003, and said that he was only able to return to Iraq due to the Coalition intervention. Numani cited several instances of America's good behavior toward Muslims, including actions in Bosnia and Kuwait, and assistance in the development of an Iraqi constitution and parliament. Numani said that he would do his best to mobilize the people of Wasit to approve the SOFA and support the Prime Minister. He warned that if the SOFA

fails, Iraq will fall into a political quagmire and that Iraqi Police will be overwhelmed in dealing with criminal and insurgent threats.

15. (C//REL TO USA, ACGU) Numani stated believes the SOFA would pass the Council of Representatives without difficulty if it was put to a secret ballot, but fears that members might not have the courage to pass the measure in an open vote. He also said that he did not believe Muqtada al-Sadr could affect the outcome of the vote at this point.

Frequent Visits With Muqtada

16. (C/ / REL USA, ACGU) Numani stated that he is not a member of any Sadrist party or affiliated with any political Qmember of any Sadrist party or affiliated with any political party. However, Numani, who is 56 years old, told us that his ties to the Sadr family go back to the 1970's when he was a student of Mohammad Baqir Sadr and a friend of Muqtada's father, with whom he studied in al-Hawsa. He claims to know Muqtada well and to have carried him around when he was a child. In fact, Numani said he had spoken with Muqtada the previous week, and that he intended to visit him in Iran the following week.

17. (C/REL USA, ACGU) Numani reported that Muqtada al-Sadr does not oppose the SOFA, per se. He explained that Muqtada had become fixated on the idea that the Americans intended to occupy Iraq forever and were here to take Iraq's oil. Numani added that he had visited Muqtada ten times in the recent past and had explained to him that the

BAGHDAD 00003722 002 OF 002

Americans were helping Iraq and they did not intend to stay in Iraq permanently or to steal Iraqi oil. Numani claimed that Muqtada had recently told him that the SOFA could be acceptable so long as U.S. soldiers eventually left Iraq. When questioned about recent public statements attributed to Muqtada opposing the SOFA, Numani responded that Muqtada sometimes lies to the press, and added the comment "we all do." In general, Numani painted a picture of Muqtada as an immature man lacking education and proper guidance, and who in leading the Sadr elements had faced a situation in which his responsibility greatly exceeded his experience.

18. (C/ / REL USA, ACGU) Comment: Numani, who spent 23 years in exile in Iran, was exceedingly open about his relationships with PM Maliki and Muqtada al-Sadr, and his frequent trips to Iran. Numani referred to the United States as a safety valve for the entire world, and Sistani and Maliki now as the safety valves for Iraq. Numani has PM Maliki's ear and access to organizational resources in staging the recent SOFA rally. It remains to be seen if he also has influence with Muqtada al-Sadr and the actions of his remaining organization in Iraq. End comment.
CROCKER